

# **Does God Exist?**

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Hamed Soltanian**

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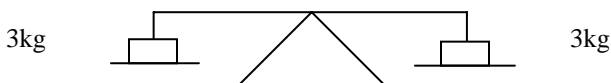
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*In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

## 1 Is there a God?

When one contemplates over him/herself and his/her surroundings, then one realizes that it is not impossible for these things not to exist and that it is possible for them to either exist or not exist. One realises that it is neither a necessity nor impossibility for their essences to exist. This is because if it were necessary for them to exist then it would be impossible and a contradiction for them not to exist and if it was impossible for them to exist then it would be a contradiction for them to exist. Such beings in Philosophical terms are said to have contingent existence and are known as contingent beings. In theological terminology they are known as created beings.

Contingent (i.e., created) beings need a cause (i.e., a Creator) for their existence and without a cause it is impossible for them to come into existence. To explain this further, consider the analogy of a balance with equal weights on both sides, it would be impossible for one side to dominate over the other without an external cause. The only difference between this analogy and what was discussed above is that contingent beings are dependent on an external cause for their very existence and non-existence. The cause of non-existence is simply the absence of an existential cause. That means, for example, a pink elephant does not exist because there is no cause to bring it into existence. The concept of a pink elephant however does have a cause and that is why such a concept exists in our minds.



Can one side of this balance dominate over the other without an external cause?

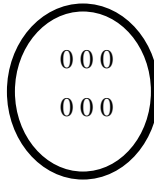
Therefore, since every contingent being (such as a person, trees, planet earth, the galaxy, the universe, etc...) needs a cause for its existence then, that cause has to be either the being itself, another being like it (i.e. another contingent being), or something completely different.

It is impossible for a contingent being to give existence to itself, since how can it make anything exist, including itself, if it does not exist in the first place. In simple terms, how can it give anything to anybody if it does not have it itself and there is no self to begin with.

Another being like it (i.e. another contingent being) cannot give it existence either, since that being also needs to exist to be capable of giving existence, but in the same way it cannot come into existence by itself. This principle applies to every single contingent being and therefore applies to the entirety of possible beings (the whole of the universe, universes, etc..), since the entirety of contingent beings is simply the collection of all contingent beings and not a separate entity of itself. Nevertheless, as it will be discussed below, what characterises a contingent being applies both to the universe as a whole and what is in the universe individually.

To clarify the abovementioned point further, consider a row of zeros. Each individual zero is equal to zero (meaning that there is no such individual in the first place), a row of ten zeros still equals zero, infinite number of zeros again equal zero. Hence, since every single unit in the series is equal to zero, then the series as a whole also equals zero.

Contingent beings are zero (i.e., non-existent) before they exist. Hence, no matter whether you consider two contingent entities, a thousand contingent entities or an infinite number of contingent entities, they all have the essential characteristic of requiring a cause in order to make them an existent entity and no longer zero.



Question: If each number in a series is equal to zero then what does the series as a whole equal to? Answer: A BIG ZERO ☺

Based on what has been said above, one concludes that all contingent beings (human beings, plants, animals, rock and soil, planets, universe and so forth) have been given existence (i.e., have been caused to exist) by Him who does not have a cause for His existence. He has necessary existence in the sense that His existence is one with His essence and therefore must exist necessarily.

In other words, everything other than God has been created by God who has not been created Himself. God is He who exists without a cause and whose life, knowledge, power and other perfect attributes is one with His essence.

Why can it not be said that one contingent being created another contingent being who created another contingent being and so on ad infinitum?

This all depends on a correct explanation of what it means to be an existential cause of something. For example, is a carpenter who constructs a table, the existential cause of the table? The answer is no. The carpenter has only given the table form. The material of the table certainly existed before the carpenter turned it into a table, may be even before the carpenter was born. An existential cause can never be separated from its effect in the sense that it can never be the case that the existential cause stops giving its effect existence so that the effect is able to exist on its own. Take the example



of a writer and the act of writing. The act of writing is in constant need of the writer for its existence. If it happens that the writer ceases to exist or stops writing then, the act of writing will also cease to exist.

Contingent beings are also in need of that which brings them into existence for their continued existence. The difference between the writer and the act of writing and the contingent being and its Creator is that the writer and the act of writing are both contingent and therefore are both in need of something else for their continued existence. God, on the other hand, is not in need of anything for His existence because He exists necessarily.

Hence, every contingent entity, no matter how large the number of contingent entities is taken to be, will need a cause and the whole of contingent entities, being comprised of contingent beings and therefore contingent itself, also needs a cause. That cause must give them existence continuously and not give them existence once and then cease to give them existence. Otherwise the contingent being will cease to exist if the cause stops giving it existence. If the contingent being could exist by itself then it would not be a contingent being but a necessary one while clearly the essence of something that has come into existence and did not exist before cannot have necessary existence in the sense that it would be impossible for it not to exist.

So through logical reasoning it has been proven that for things that did not exist at one time but then came into existence there must be a Creator whose existence is necessary and whose non-existence is impossible. Accordingly, our selves and our surroundings are proof for the existence of that Creator, who is termed by philosophers as the Necessary Being and who is, in other words, God.

## **2      How can we tell the universe is a contingent entity?**

The question might be raised as to how is it that we make the claim that the universe and everything in it has contingent existence rather than necessary existence. Why can we not say that the universe is not the necessary existence we are looking for?

Several replies can be given to such an objection. First, the universe is nothing but the combination of its parts on several different levels (i.e., level of physical bodies, physical energy and so forth). Each of those is contingent and therefore the whole is also contingent.

Second, the universe can be conceived. That the essence of which can be conceived is contingent because we have created its essence in our minds. It did not exist in our mind before but then it began to exist. Furthermore, it is limited as it is able to fit in our limited minds while something unlimited and having necessary existence cannot fit in our minds. We can only know that God exists and that He is unlimited and has all the attributes of perfection such as knowledge, power and so forth. However, we can never conceive God's essence and being.

We can conceive of the universe as either existing or not existing in the sense that we can imagine a different kind of universe while we cannot conceive God as existing or not existing in the same sense. Since God has all the attributes of perfection any other 'kind' of god we imagine would certainly not be perfect and therefore limited and contingent.

## **Is God created?**

If we are all created then why is it that we cannot say the same thing about God?

We have already answered this objection in our discussion above. That is, God has necessary existence and therefore does not need a cause (i.e., a creator) for its existence. We and every other contingent being, however, are in need of a cause.

So why can't we say that we also have necessary existence?

Because, if we did then it would be necessary for us to exist and clearly it is neither necessary for us nor anything else contingent to exist.

## Oneness of God

Now that God's existence has been proven, one has to make efforts to seek the true God so as not to worship a thing who is not the true Creator.

If the claim is made that there is more than one God then, it must necessarily be admitted that those gods have both something in common and something that differentiates them. That is, in order for there to be two of something there must be something in common between the two so that they can be said to be of the same kind. There must also be a distinguishing characteristic between the two for otherwise if there is nothing that distinguishes them they will be the one and the same thing. Say, if the claim is made that there are two gods. Such a claim necessarily means that those two gods have something in common and something that distinguishes them. What they have in common is their godness and therefore what distinguishes them has to be something other than their godness. In philosophical terminology, what is common between the two is the fact that they both exist necessarily (i.e., their necessary existence). Since, if they do not both exist necessarily then, the one that does not would be the creation of the other that does and therefore would not be God. There must also be a differentia that distinguishes the two from each other and that differentia is necessarily other than their necessary existence. However, that which exists but does not exist necessarily can only be contingent. In other words, that which is not godness can only be something other than godness. Something that is other than godness is something created. Hence, that differentia must be created and have contingent existence. But that would mean a contradiction in terms, for the two gods were said to have necessary existence but if their differentia is contingent then they are comprised

of a necessary element and a contingent element. That which is comprised of parts is in need of its parts in order to exist. Therefore, based on what was established above, if there are two gods then, each will be in need of their necessary existence and their differentia which has contingent existence. In other words, they will be in need of their godness and their differentia which is created. Such gods do not have necessary existence as they are in need of other things, namely a contingent element, for their existence. The question arises as to who created that contingent element. Such gods are no gods at all as they are comprised of a created element. In conclusion, to assert that there are two gods, is in reality (i.e., its logical conclusion is) the denial of any God (or denial of any Necessary Being).

To put this in simple terms take G to represent godness. To say that there are two gods then there must be:

$$G \quad \text{and} \quad G_1$$

The number 1 represents the differentia and must not be godness (i.e., not have necessary existence). Therefore,  $G_1$  is comprised of two elements, one the element of godness, the other the element of being created. That would mean that  $G_1$  is in need of its parts or elements for its existence. One such element is contingent that results in  $G_1$  being in need of a contingent element for its existence. That contingent element must have a cause for its existence. Hence  $G_1$  must also have a cause for its existence and therefore be contingent.

What if the differentia is also a necessary element?

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq, the sixth Shi'ah Imam (God's peace and blessings be upon him), has given a beautiful answer to such an objection. In fact, as far as I am aware such an objection has never been raised in any theo-

-logical and philosophical discussion. However, Imam al-Sadiq includes the reply in his answer to a person who asked why there cannot be more than one God. Imam al-Sadiq said, "If you claim that there are two (gods), there must be a differentia so that they can be two. That differentia would become the third (god). If they became three (gods) then again between the three there needs to be a differentia in order for the three to become reality and therefore the three (gods) would become five (gods). In conclusion, if there is more than one God (then,) there must be infinite gods."

The meaning of Imam al-Sadiq's reply is that if there are two gods then there must be a differentia between them and that differentia having necessary existence is another god. In our example above, if there is  $G$  and  $G_1$  then,  $G$  and  $G_1$  as a separate entity and 1 are all gods. But there must be something that distinguishes the three gods from each other. This time there must be two extra elements in order to distinguish two gods from the third one. Those two extra elements must also have necessary existence which would make altogether five gods and so on ad infinitum. Such a conclusion results in an impossible regress.

If every differentia is also god then, the infinite differentiae are all the same as the first  $G$ , which means that they cannot be distinguished as separate gods. That is, there is no differentiating factor or element between them as they are all godness or necessary beings. If there is no differentiating factor then there is only one God and not infinite and the original claim of there being more than one God and the subsequent result of claiming there are infinite gods is both refuted. In simple words, to claim there is more than one God is to claim there is infinite gods but infinite gods that are not distinguishable. What cannot be distinguished cannot be numerous and must refer only to one thing. Therefore, the

claim of infinite gods is self-contradictory and is consequently refuted.

Only from an infallible individual such as the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (God's peace and blessings be upon him) can we acquire such an amazing proof that can only be rooted in divine inspiration.

As it was established above God is not in need of or dependent on anything for His existence and that His existence is necessary. Not being dependent of course means that He has no limitations since limitations come with dependence. This means that God is not composed of parts of any sort, including a body. His attributes are one with His essence. This is because anything that is composed of parts is in need of those parts and anything that is in need of another for its existence cannot be said to have necessary existence.

God cannot have anything in common with His creation. God is necessary while other things are contingent in every sense. If God had anything in common with that of contingent beings a logical contradiction would arise. The contradiction is in the fact that such a similarity would mean that God would have a characteristic, property and/or attribute that can be brought into existence. That would mean that God is contingent and that was proven to be incorrect.

As it was discussed above, God being a Necessary Existent Being means that He does not have any limitations, whether such a limitation is in terms of having a partner or limitation in terms of having a body or limitation in terms of being visible. So human beings will never be able to see God, or have any other sensual perception of Him. This is because, the human intellect can only perceive what it can transfer into his/her mind and make one with his/her own existence. That means what a person perceives is a contingent being as is the case that it did not exist at one time in his/her mind

but came about when the senses were stimulated. God, being a Necessary Being, the same in essence and attribute and not having any limitation cannot be perceived by human beings and all other limited beings. The fact that God exists can only be known through reasoning and felt by the heart.



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